



# Rhythms of grace

In the ebb and flow of liturgy, God is at work, whether we hear him or not.



by  
Linards Jansons

## Serving the church and our world

**Being a 'public servant' is not the most glamorous job in the world, but it is a very important and necessary part of our society's functioning. Without a public service, many things we take for granted—from receiving medical refunds to expecting a fair wage—simply would not happen.**

When we worship also we are engaged in an act of public service. The original meaning of the word 'liturgy' (from the Greek *leitourgia*) is 'a public service'. Liturgy was any work undertaken by concerned citizens on behalf of and for the wellbeing of their community. For example, if a wealthy benefactor funded the building of a public road or a bridge, this was their *leitourgia*, their 'liturgy'.

The one place where the church engages in public service is in its 'prayer of the church'. This is where we put into practice Paul's admonition in 1 Timothy 2:1,2: 'I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness'.

This public service focuses on two main things. The first is God's church. After giving thanks for earthly and spiritual blessings, we pray for all the people of God, the whole Christian church, and especially for its servants and leaders. But this is

not a self-centred act! Our prayer is that the church will be enabled to be salt and light **in the world**, bringing to this earth the gospel of God's forgiveness, healing and peace.

The second focus is on the world itself. Here we exercise our role as the 'priesthood of believers' by bringing the world and its many needs to God. What the world's systems and powers cannot do for it, we will gladly do for it—not from a judgemental or superior point of view, but by identifying with its needs and problems. After all, we too are part of that world. By our prayer, we stand in solidarity with the entire human race, regardless of politics, religion or culture. This is our public service for the world.

But just as in our personal lives prayer can become inwardly focused, so also that can happen in our congregational life. So while it's true that nothing is too small for prayer, the special task of the church's prayer is to look beyond its own concerns and boundaries. There are other times and places to pray for birthdays, meetings and picnics! But here is a unique opportunity to serve the world God loves, enters and suffers for. And we too, having prayed for the world, will re-enter that world to love and serve it in the same spirit that we prayed for it.

**Rev Linards Jansons teaches Liturgy and Worship at Australian Lutheran College.**